DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 256 349 IR 051 091

AUTHOR Piotrowski, Chris; Perdue, Robert
TITLE Online Literature Retrieval: An Alternative Strategy.
PUB DATE [85]
NOTE 9p.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Databases; Higher Education; *Information Retrieval; Information Sources; Information Systems; *Online Searching; *Online Systems; *Psychology; Research Tools; *Search Strategies
IDENTIFIERS DIALOG

ABSTRACT

This study investigated the efficacy of utilizing comprehensive database search strategies in performing an online literature search in the subject area of psychology, with special interest in the performance of the database PsycInfo. The DIALOG Information Retrieval Service's DIALINDEX subject category options were used as the major search vehicle to determine the number of relevant "hits" in each of several databases and to ascertain redundancy of citations across the databases. Databases for the DIALINDEX subject categories of PSYCH including PsycINFO) and MEDICINE were accessed with two sample searches using the descriptors psychopathology/social influences and psychopathology/social class. The results of these searches was that databases other than PsycINFO (Excerpta Medica and Medline) also provided relevant citations, and that overlap of citations between the databases was negligible. The findings suggest that online literature searches involving psychological topics should include comprehensive database strategies. Several major commercial services offer such multi-database options. (Author/THC)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED256349

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

Online Literature Retrieval: An Alternative Research Strategy

Chris Piotrowski and Robert Perdue

The University of West Florida

Running head: ONLINE LITERATURE RETRIEVAL

IR051091

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Chris Piotrowski

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Abstract

The present article investigated the efficacy of utilizing comprehensive database search strategies in performing a literature retrieval. The DIALOG service was utilized with DIALINDEX subject category options as the major search vehicle. Databases from the DIALINDEX subject categories PSYCH (which includes PsycINFO) and MEDICINE were accessed with two sample searches. The results of these searches indicated that databases other than PsycINFO provided relevant citations. Overlap of citations between databases was negligible. The findings suggest that online literature retrieval involving psychological topics should include comprehensive database strategies. Several major commercial services offer such multi-database options.

Online Literature Retrieval: An Alternative Research Strategy

Admittedly, the "information explosion" in psychology has made the literature retrieval process a challenging but arduous enterprise. Fortunately, psychology researchers have several excellent sources on the topic of library use and bibliographic retrieval (e.g., Borchardt & Francis, 1984; Reed & Baxter, 1983). Recently several articles have stressed competence in utilizing the PsycINFO database as the major source in obtaining comprehensive coverage of the psychological literature (Feinberg, Drews, & Eynman, 1981; Gardner, 1977).

Computerized online information retrieval facilitates bibliographic inquiry and serves as an adjunct to more traditional search strategies (Takooshian, 1984). To the unwary researcher, however, the normally excellent results obtained from searching PsycINFO could exclude literature from other sources that may be relevant to a research topic and provide the investigator with a false sense of confidence. Considering the vast number of currently available databases and online services (e.g., DIALOG, SDC, BRS) it would be instructive to determine the utility of databases other than PsycINFO in conducting a literature search. Thus, the purpose of the present study was to perform an online literature search on two topics in psychology utilizing the comprehensive DIALOG retrieval system (which includes PsycINFO) to determine the quantity of relevant "hits" in each of several different databases and to ascertain redundancy of citations across the various databases.

The three major online services produce information directories that access all the databases in each system that are relevant to a large number of subject categories (e.g., Psychology, Medicine, Law). These unique subject categories provide a listing of the number of "hits" available in each of the databases assigned to these database groupings. DIALINDEX, the directory that accesses all of the databases in the DIALOG online service (Hewes, 1983), was utilized in the present inquiry.

In Example 1 a search was conducted in the DIALINDEX subject category labeled PSYCH (see Table 1). This category includes eight databases (ERIC, Social Scisearch, PsycINFO, Sociological Abstracts, Child Abuse and Neglect, Mental Health Abstracts, PsycALERT, and Family Resources). This example utilized the combination of descriptor terms psychopathology/social influences obtained from the Thesaurus of Psychological Index Terms. The ERIC file produced nine hits for the combination of the descriptor terms psychopathology/social influences. The PsycINFO file provided six hits, and the Mental Health Abstracts file yielded three hits. All other databases in the PSYCH category posted no hits. The comparison for overlap of the references indicated no redundancy across these three productive databases. A scan of the articles and reference sources from these databases revealed that all sources appeared to be relevant to the research topic.

The objective of Example 2 was to investigate topics with enough breadth to be productive beyond the PSYCH subject category (see Table 1). It was decided to run a search with the combination of the descriptor terms psychopathology/social class utilizing the PSYCH and MEDICINE subject categories of DIALINDEX. Analysis of the citations obtained from the PSYCH search indicated several references (n=14) from databases other than PsycINFO (see Table 1). Specifically, only two of these hits were also listed in PsychINFO; that is, of the 21 PsycINFO hits, 19 were unique citations. For the MEDICINE category only the Excerpta Medica and Medline databases proved fruitful (37 hits). However, it was noteworthy that only one citation appeared in both databases. Moreover, a comparison of the citations between the PSYCH and MEDICINE subject categories revealed that only one reference was common to both categories. Thus, citations were not only predominantly unique within each DIALINDEX category, but also between these two major subject areas.

The findings of the current online information exercise indicated the efficacy of utilizing databases other than PsycINFO as an adjunct in comprehensive literature retrieval. Indeed, there was almost no duplication of citations obtained from the PSYCH and MEDICINE DIALINDEX categories. The implications of these results seem quite evident; that is, it is incumbent upon the researcher to retrieve relevant information, and apparently pertinent literature may be overlooked by limiting a computer search to the PsycINFO database alone.

But why do retrieval results vary (or are incomplete) when several databases index identical source journals? Unfortunately, each database inputs available articles and other research sources utilizing a variety of descriptors which are obviously not necessarily uniform across databases. Therefore, some citations are not retrieved due to variance in indexing practices. Psychological researchers are encouraged to utilize comprehensive database searching strategies, such as the use of DIALINDEX, in performing a thorough literature retrieval. On this very point, Brand and Kinzie (1984) suggest a comprehensive online strategy for searching the psychoanalytic literature. This strategy has been suggested for researchers in other scientific fields as well (Brody & Lambert, 1984; Shorthill, 1985).

References

Borchardt, D., & Francis, R. (1984). How to find out in psychology. New York: Pergamon.

Brand, A. A., & Kinzie, L. A. (1984). A comparison of online access to psychoanalytic literature. DATABASE, 7, 54-63.

Brody, F., & Lambert, M. (1984). Alternative databases for anthropology searching. DATABASE, 7, 28-32.

Feinberg, R. A., Drews, D., & Eynman, D. (1981). Positive side effects of online information retrieval. Teaching of Psychology, 8, 51-52.

Gardner, L. E. (1977). A relatively painless method of introduction to the psychological literature search. Teaching of Psychology, 4, 89-91.

Hewes, J. J. (1983). DIALOG: The ultimate on-line library. PC World, [illegible] 74-88.

Reed, J. G., & Baxter, P. M. (1983). Library use: A handbook for psychology. Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association.

Shorthill, R. R. (1985). Unexpected online sources for business information. Online, 9, 68-72.

Takooshian, H. (1984, August). Teaching library research: Manual versus computer retrieval methods. Paper presented at the meeting of the American Psychological Association, Toronto.

Table 1

Frequency of "Hits" Obtained in DIALINDEX Subject Category PSYCH

PSYCH Category Databases	Example 1 Descriptors: Psychopathology/ Social Influences Hits	Example 2 Descriptors: Psychopathology/ Social Class Hits
ERIC/'66-'84	9	5
Social Scisearch '72-'84/wk 40	0	1
PsycINFO	6	21
Sociological Abstracts/'63-'84	0	1
Child Abuse & Neglect/Fall '83	0	0
Mental Health Abstracts/'69-'84	3	6
PsycALERT/Nov 05 '84	0	0
Family Resources/'70-'84	0	1